

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a dense forest with many green trees and foliage. A semi-transparent green rectangular overlay covers the top half of the image, serving as a background for the text.

Grand Junction  
Master Plan

# Opportunity Analysis Executive Summary

Prepared for the Downtown Westfield Neighborhood Association  
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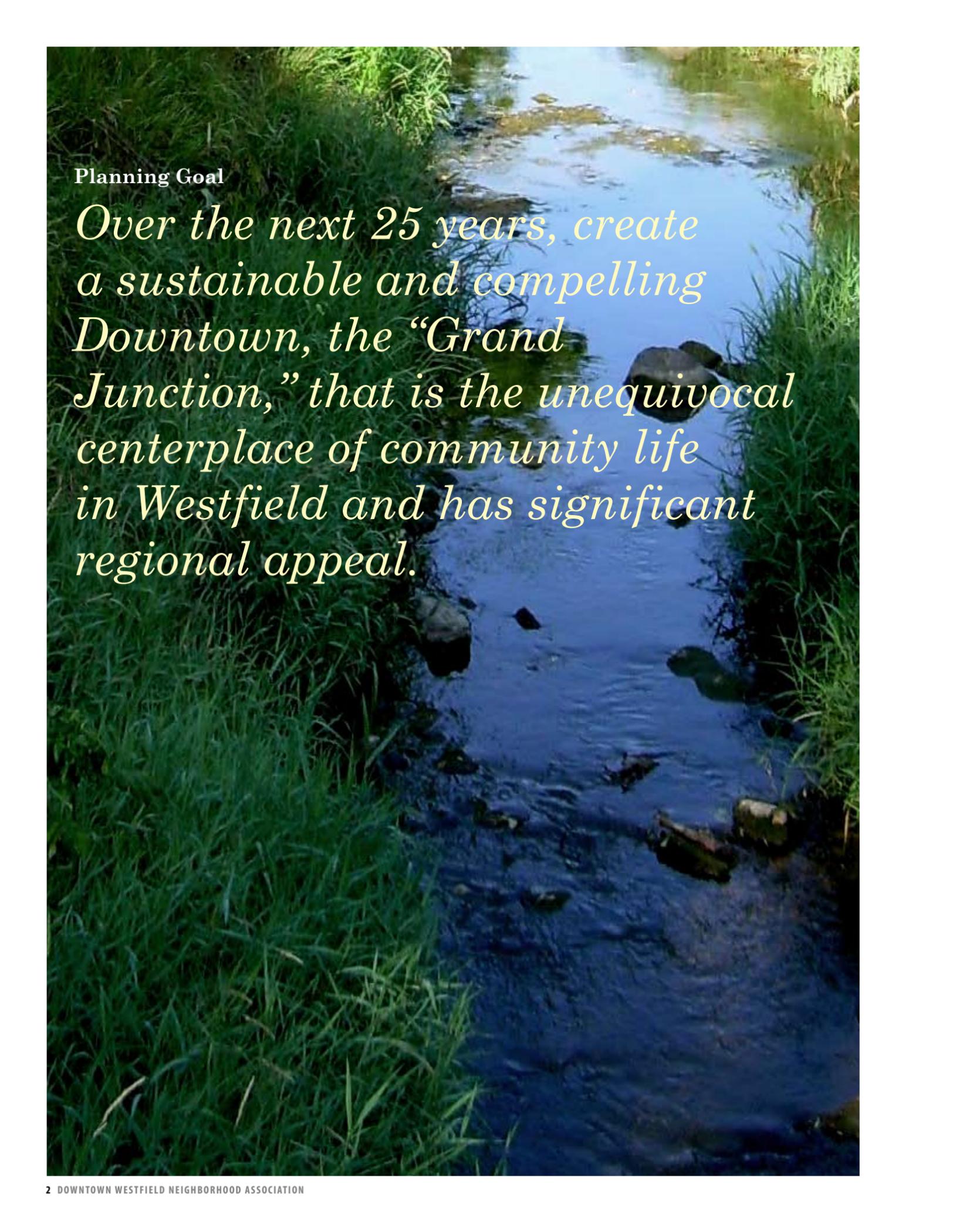


## Introduction

This Opportunity Analysis culminates the first phase of a three-phase planning process for Downtown Westfield in what is known as the Grand Junction Master Planning process. The other two phases, the development of Alternative Strategies and the refinement of a Final Master Plan, will be completed in the coming months. We anticipate that the Final Master Plan will be complete in early 2009.

The consultant team is very excited with what we have learned to date about the prospects for Downtown Westfield and the Grand Junction. The passion and enthusiasm that planning participants and Grand Junction Task Group (GJTG) members expressed regarding the future of Downtown Westfield were clear throughout the Opportunity Analysis process. Thanks to strong regional growth, a well-connected (and improving) roadway network and compelling natural features, Westfield has the opportunity to create an extraordinary, family-friendly, mixed-use destination focused on significant open space and a new regional trail system, portions of which are now under construction.

In addition to these opportunities, our analysis revealed some other important considerations such as financing, land assembly and regulatory processes that will challenge our remaining work and the implementation process. These challenges will be the subject of continued analysis and discussion as we create the Alternative Strategies. These Alternative Strategies will explore priority opportunities in greater detail, including land uses, scale, location, character, infrastructure, costs and prospective revenues.



Planning Goal

*Over the next 25 years, create a sustainable and compelling Downtown, the “Grand Junction,” that is the unequivocal centerplace of community life in Westfield and has significant regional appeal.*

## Planning Objectives

### **Establish the ‘Grand Junction’ Brand**

A brand, at its most basic, is a promise. A clearly articulated brand promise helps Westfield successfully compete for its share of business, talent, tourists, investors, respect, attention and other precious resources. We know that stakeholders believe that key brand characteristics should revolve around the idea that Westfield is a “Grand Junction” of two major recreation trails in Central Indiana. However, the consultant team believes that the Grand Junction is not just an intersection of trails, but is a place where many kinds of connections are made, including but not limited to: waterways and nature, roadways and access, families and friends, the story of the underground railroad and freedom, and the developed / undeveloped portions of Hamilton County.

### **Showcase the Natural Environment**

The environmental quality and natural features of the Grand Junction area will have a significant impact on its brand promise and image. Trails and other active / passive outdoor recreational activities means that the Grand Junction will be continuously exposed to a wide number of people throughout the year, some of whom will include prospective residents and investors and, potentially, enthusiastic supporters of the Grand Junction experience. It is critical that stakeholders establish a leadership position around the premise that natural resources are limited and really matter to the success of Westfield. Current research and trends indicate that this sort of leadership attracts desirable uses, builds investor confidence and helps ensure that the Grand Junction’s fundamental brand promise is continuously validated and strengthened.

### **Create a Downtown Core Area that is Comfortable for People**

Creating a comfortable environment for people means that pedestrian activities are at a manageable distance for users (traditionally 1/4 to 1/2 of a mile is the extent of a “manageable” walk; 5 to 10 minutes) and that those accommodations are balanced with the needs of motorists.

A core area of about 100 acres in and around Westfield’s traditional Downtown meets this rule of thumb. This area is roughly defined by Penn Street to the north, Park Street to the south, East Street on the east and US 31 on the west. At this time, the core area includes some well-defined edges (US 31, Park Street, East Street), key ‘junctions’ (US 31 / SR 32 intersection, SR 32 / Union Street intersection, Anna Kendall Drain / J.W. Thompson Drain confluence), important landmarks (City Hall, Hadley Park, Asa Bales Park) and well-defined districts (Westfield Washington schools campus, traditional Downtown Westfield).

### **Create a Mix of Engaging, Unique Destinations**

We have concluded that, because of the proximity of significant existing and planned retail development in and around the City of Westfield, Downtown Westfield will not be a major retail destination. Rather, its success will revolve around a mix of specialty retail, dining, office, residential, institutional, cultural and recreational uses that are artfully and thoughtfully organized into compelling “places” and experiences that drive user interest and offer something distinctive that cannot be found in other areas.

### **Provide Exceptional User Hospitality**

A key characteristic of successful mixed-use centers is the ease with which they can be accessed and navigated by a variety of transportation modes. Although an ‘extreme’ trail philosophy is a focus of the Grand Junction’s brand promise, motorists must always be able to easily reach key destinations and park conveniently. For those who walk and ride bikes, the ‘Grand Junction’ must be a safe, comfortable, attractive and highly enjoyable experience. For those without access to automobiles (youth, seniors, disabled), and those that choose to not have automobiles, there must be accommodation for some sort of public transport.

### **Maintain Financial Stability**

We know how anxious the GJTG is to see projects come out of the ground. However, the lack of predictability in the current market underscores the need for the Grand Junction Master Plan to balance the desire for distinctive private development and public spaces with the availability of capital resources. Nonetheless, we expect investments in public space and facilities to be a catalyst for private sector investment in and around the downtown.

## Opportunities

### **Expedite Plans for an Extensive Local Trail System Linked to Regional Trails**

Clearly the Monon Trail is a popular amenity in Indianapolis and Carmel. That popularity can be reasonably assumed for future trails as well. Westfield has positioned itself to capitalize on this trend for some time and has made extensive strides in planning for a network of trails in the community.

An opportunity exists to expand the thinking about this trail system and start to adopt an attitude that Westfield is THE place for trails and outdoor recreation. The community, and especially this downtown area, has the opportunity to be known for its extensive trail system and extraordinary Grand Junction destination.

### **Create a Street Network that Links the Grand Junction with Surrounding Neighborhoods, the rest of Westfield and the Region.**

In concert with an extensive trail system, the Grand Junction area also can have a street network that is accessible, easy to use and exceptionally attractive. The mantra cannot be 'just trails' or 'just roads,' it should be both, and they should be designed with all users in mind.

Because Westfield is at the growing suburban fringe of Indianapolis, there is an emerging need to tackle roadway capacity and design issues. This is a tremendous opportunity to "get it right" while there is commitment to addressing these issues. US 31 is already undergoing plans for expansion and development as a limited-access interstate style highway. SR 32 is also beginning a design process for reconstruction. These two roadways represent two major 'lifelines' of users and access to the Grand Junction area. Simply put, the traffic they bring is a good thing. The opportunity exists to design them in a manner that accommodates this traffic, yet does not ignore the needs of the pedestrian or the effects of traffic on the desired quality of places being developed.

In addition to these larger roadways, a local network of "complete" streets can be constructed in a way that creates superb connectivity to the downtown. The creation of unique, character filled roadway designs that accommodate pedestrians will begin to tackle the issue of fiscal responsibility in the fact that what were once just roads are now streets, trails and "always on" marketing pieces for the community.

### **Create a Dramatic 'Grand Junction' place in the Core Area of Downtown Westfield**

Sense of place is often lacking in suburban communities. Some communities try to build that sense of place, but fail to take a holistic view of the concept of placemaking and the elements that are all part of a successful and compelling space. Westfield has a tremendous opportunity to buck that trend and create a dramatic space in the heart of the community. This space, the 'Grand Junction,' can take shape just south of the intersection of SR 32 and Union Street, where the Anna Kendall Drain, J.W. Thompson Drain and plans for the Midland and Monon trails converge.

The opportunity exists to capitalize on these natural resources as well as the plans for the trail system to create a destination that will not only draw users, but will also attract investment and development on and near the Grand Junction itself. What makes this opportunity unique is the convergence of not only the trails and natural features, but also heavy automobile traffic on SR 32 and Union Street that can bring even larger numbers of users to the site.

### **Incorporate a New Library and New City Hall into the Grand Junction**

Civic buildings are generators of traffic, both automobile and pedestrian. They are also sources of community pride and places to gather as a community. From an operational standpoint, the growing Westfield community is at a point where decisions about future facilities are becoming more pressing each day.

This pressing demand represents an opportunity that can best be described as a 'win-win' for both the future of the Grand Junction area and the institutions themselves. In the case of the library, a move to the downtown area would give tremendous access to a large highway system (SR 32 and US 31) and allow for adjacency to other civic and cultural institutions that could increase the attractiveness of library services to citizens of the community. For City Hall, the relocation would bring needed space upgrades and would put this important City Hall building in the center of the community, improving access, recognition and civic adjacency as well. Finally, for the Grand Junction itself, these new institutions would help bring prominence and traffic to support additional amenities such as a Grand Junction plaza, the trails and future private market development.

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### **Focus New Residential and Commercial Space on Open Spaces along the Anna Kendall Drain**

Enhanced natural features in urban settings have a long history of being economic development drivers. The unique visual relief of such features makes investment in the Anna Kendall drain particularly attractive for Westfield.

Since the Anna Kendall Drain and J.W. Thompson Drain flow directly through the heart of the Grand Junction area, they provide a significant opportunity for investment and improvements that should, ultimately, create a return through high performance development on adjacent properties. A long, linear, park-like setting along the drains, converging at the Grand Junction plaza, will begin to create desirability for new development to locate on or near the spaces.

### **Create a Signature Development (preferably a hotel) at Southeast Corner of the US 31 / SR 32 Intersection**

Major roadway interchanges are obvious locations for development. As points of access on a heavily traveled roadway, they offer the opportunity to attract an already captive audience. However, the quality of development and sense of place at most interchanges often leaves users underwhelmed and lacks any sense of local connection and character.

Because of the heavily traveled nature of US 31 and the proximity to the larger urban center of Indianapolis, there is an opportunity for a hotel development at the newly planned interchange. While this could be successful in each of the four quadrants of the interchange, it is believed that a hotel in the southeast quadrant could have multiple benefits for downtown including: acting as a catalyst for property assembly for redevelopment, being a foot traffic generator for the Grand Junction area, becoming a signature design and architecture piece and “always on” marketing representing the quality of the Westfield experience.

### **Create Complimentary Commercial Gateway Developments at “New” US 31 / SR 32 Intersection**

As described in the opportunity for a hotel, the intersection of US 31 and SR 32 is a ‘grand junction’ in itself and has projections of being seen by more than 100,000 people in cars a day. Currently, the development patterns and character of this area do not paint a cohesive picture for potential visitors to the Westfield community.

As the two major roadway projects are completed, a significant opportunity will exist to re-imagine and reshape the character of this interchange. Because of the close proximity to the Grand Junction area, this interchange must be thought of as an actual part of the downtown experience and lead visitors into the heart of Westfield. Each potential development must then think of itself as a gateway development for the Grand Junction and adopt themes, character and design elements that help to create a consistent story for users.

### **Create New Residential and Commercial Development Nearby (like 161st Street) that Supports Downtown**

Around the country, successful suburban downtown development is almost always supported by additional development in near proximity. This additional development provides the user a set of choices at a large scale, giving users options to utilize for their particular need. From a marketing as well as land use standpoint, the Grand Junction area cannot exist in a vacuum. Planned developments in the surrounding area (Lantern Commons, Eagletown, etc.) must be viewed as complementary to the overall mission of the Grand Junction.

An opportunity, therefore, exists to capitalize on the large amount of planned and entitled development around the Grand Junction area, rather than combat it. As new development is considered, the community must work hard to promote the kind of quality and character that will contribute to the Grand Junction brand. This experience can then be packaged to a wider audience as a collective City of Westfield system of high quality developments that can meet the spectrum of user needs and desired experiences.

### **Promote Sustainability as Part of the Grand Junction Brand**

Resources are limited. Unlike the past 50-100 years of American history, future trends indicate that this fact is playing a greater role in our economic, physical and social world than ever before. While sustainability is certainly a buzzword of the moment, the communities that embrace the facts of limited resources will have a continuous competitive advantage over those that do not commit to understanding this future. In Westfield, the opportunity is not only to embrace a high performance attitude and mentality, but also to become a known leader. This opportunity is inherently embedded in all the other opportunities listed above. Each decision about future development, infrastructure and overall economic viability has a role in creating a genuinely sustainable environment for the Grand Junction area. By squeezing value out of decisions large and small, Westfield can be committed to not only the project objective of financial stability, but a longer-term objective of becoming a place that stands the test of time.

## Special Considerations

### Financing Implementation

Many consumers and banking institutions in the housing mortgage markets have been over-leveraged in recent years. Municipalities are not immune to this potential. In fact, some are significantly over-leveraged and dealing with the costs of over zealous development models.

The City of Westfield, through population growth and management of resources, is in good financial standing. As the master plan for the Grand Junction area is implemented, it will be critical to keep this standing. Therefore, the planning and implementation process must carefully balance the desire for exceptional public improvements and development along with the community's capacity to finance it.

### Assembling Key Properties

The city or some other quasi-public entity will have to acquire several privately owned properties in order to site key public facilities and create important public spaces in the Grand Junction. And since the Grand Junction is not a suburban greenfield development, property acquisition may be challenging. Consequently, each step of the redevelopment effort must build upon the previous, and, at the same time, be able to stand on its own should market conditions, resources or stakeholder interests change the optimal timing for implementation.

### Keeping the Library Downtown

The Westfield Washington Public Library system has pressing needs for a new facility to provide the level of service that is expected by the township residents that it serves. This need places the Library Board in a position where it must look at many alternatives and make decisions that are best for the future of the library and its constituents.

With this in mind, the master plan must help all stakeholders set aside past differences and provide clear advantages to the library leaders to locate this important facility at or near the Grand Junction.

### Developing Near the Anna Kendall Drain

Flooding is not a new phenomenon. Yet, in recent years, the regularity of flooding seems to have become more pronounced in some areas of the state. Regardless of the cause, the end result is always the same: understand, to the best extent possible, how development will interact with 'mother nature' when she is at her best and her worst.

The presence of the Anna Kendall Drain in downtown Westfield is certainly an opportunity. However, at the same time, it must be handled with care and understanding as a natural element of the landscape. Building near floodways and floodplains is not just a regulatory or financial issue, but also one that is a durability and value issue over the course of time. The Grand Junction master plan must address both the appeal of the waterway and the potential challenges it presents in a balanced and respectful manner.

### Defining the Municipal Role in Implementation

In many communities across the country, local municipalities have taken the lead in the redevelopment efforts of their communities. Redevelopment commissions, as agents of the government, have been able to act as intermediaries between the goals of the community and the implementation of those goals in a real estate environment that cannot always be so public in nature. Plan Commissions, by the nature of zoning and development regulations, also play a role, as do Public Works departments through infrastructure choices. However, municipal leadership in redevelopment is not always in line with the values and objectives of every community.

The City of Westfield will play an integral role in the shaping and implementation of the Grand Junction master plan vision. Understanding the extent of that role must take into account the overall community desire for government intervention into the marketplace, the speed and timing of desired improvements, the tolerance for risk and reward, and, finally, a willingness to be a partner with the private sector. The master plan will help define an appropriate role of the municipality in planning and zoning, infrastructure allocation, property assembly, public space and park development, and public and private use development.



